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THE TEACHING OF NEEDLEWORK.

(Continued from page 361).

What is called fancy work is only a very small part of the needlework that is done, and it is usually learnt after girls have left school. The work they are taught as children is intended to be rather of a useful than an ornamental nature, and laborious hours are passed not only over such superfluous superstructures as "tucks" (a species of decoration for which I have already expressed my contempt), but over the common things every woman is expected to be able to do, hemming, back-stitching, button-holing, etc. I am not going to maintain that this kind of work should not be taught. I think every girl, and for that matter every boy too, is much the better for being able to do any kind of needlework which makes a garment neat and strong and serviceable. But I do maintain that a great deal of time is wasted in the learning of these various stitches, and that after months have been spent in making, say—a pinafore, a girl will come home with no real practical knowledge of how a pinafore ought to be made, because her work has been so mechanical, and so much of her attention has been given to the smallness and straightness of the stitches that the meaning of it all has been lost sight of, and if told to cut out and make up a pinafore by herself she would be utterly unable to do it. I have met lots of women, well-educated ladies, who no doubt had passed through the proper course of instruction in needlework, and who could make stitches so neat and regular that they were *nearly* equal to the work of a slightly disorganized sewing machine, but who have said quite candidly and hopelessly, "I have not the least idea how to cut out; my nurse always does that with a paper pattern." The fact is they have been taught purely mechanically, the one idea set before them being that the stitches must be small. That

was the beginning and the end of the whole thing. This does not strike me as the way to make practical needlewomen, it only seems the way to make our daughters feel hatred and impatience of their sewing lessons. Surely the more reasonable way would be to first explain the shape and nature of the garment to be made, taking care that it shall interest the child and fill her with a desire to produce something useful and pretty. Then let her see how it is cut out, and how the various shapes have a meaning and indicate the forms of the surfaces they are meant to fit. Then why not teach her how to get through all the long seams in the only rational and satisfactory way by working a hand sewing machine? Every woman who does much needlework and can possibly afford it should have a sewing machine, and the interest and pleasure a child takes in working with a machine is delightful, while the care and attention required and the little knowledge of mechanics obtained, are capital training and of the utmost practical service. The finishing must of course be done by hand, and particular care should be taken to make sure that the buttons shall be sewn on in such a way that they will not come off. It is a rare gift, this sewing on of buttons! If the garment is a frock, and I think it ought to be something that is really interesting (a pinafore is comparatively dull) the child might be allowed and encouraged to help in designing the shape and the combination of colours used, so that a little room may be made for the exercise of taste and imagination, and the child's share of responsibility for the satisfactoriness of the whole result increased. If this is done the *end*, namely the production of something useful and pretty, is kept in view; and the *needlework*, the mechanical *means* by which this result is obtained is put into its true subordinate position. It is impossible to follow this treatment of the subject unless the result be one which a child can appreciate, and in which she can feel interest.

It is easier, no doubt, to the teacher to put into a child's hands a piece of calico ready prepared, and instruct her to work into it so many dozens of stitches of uniform size and shape, but this is not the kind of instruction that *educates*. The child sees no sense in it, she cannot be expected to see the whole meaning of what she is doing—to her it is nothing

but a few inches of white material, devoid of interest of any kind, and the mechanical difficulty to a very small child of holding a needle properly and of making neat stitches is so great, that unless her interest in the work is awakened, she is almost certain to dread and dislike the task. Moreover, she wonders why *she* must labour so painfully to produce her seam, when she is accustomed to see her mother get through piles of pretty and useful garments by the aid of her valued sewing-machine, and to hear her say, perhaps, what a comfort it is to be able to do the work so quickly, and thus leave time for reading or exercise or public work of some kind. A thoughtful child sees at once a discrepancy, a conflict between theory and practice, which is very likely to lead to a critical frame of mind, and that may end in a rebellious one. Of course it would be absurd to maintain that in every branch of a child's education she must be able to see the end—it would be impossible for a half-developed mind to do this, and a child must go through a great deal of preparatory drudgery, the reason of which she cannot understand at the time, and must have faith in her teachers for the ultimate result. But I don't think this applies to needlework. It is not a branch of intellectual training, it is a handicraft, and its ultimate aim is quite simple enough to be understood by the youngest child. The faculties it trains are the practical and productive faculties, and the qualities developed are rather those which the Kindergarten system aims at developing in little children, and technical education in older children. These qualities cannot be fully brought out unless the mode of teaching is such as to thoroughly interest the pupil, by keeping in view the nature and object of the work *as a whole*, and as bearing practically upon life, and to rouse and sustain this interest in a young child is impossible unless the work is so taught that she can understand and care about what she is doing, and in order that she can do that, the work set should be of such a kind as to be interesting in itself.

What interest can there be to a child in the composition of a pillow-case for instance? It has no shape to speak of, absolutely no colour; it has no pleasant associations (for a child!) and it is probably given out ready cut and turned down for hemming, so that every possible tinge of romance

is taken out of it before she begins the weary rows of stitches which are to be her share in its manufacture. Even these seem hardly necessary to a small child, because the pillow-case is most likely neatly tacked together before she gets it. My daughter brought home a half-finished specimen of this sort at the end of a long term's work, and I believe that it was intended that she should finish it at home. But I must make a confession—I finished the pillow-case in three minutes with the sewing-machine, and the child turned blithely to dolls' dressmaking instead. By the way, surely dolls' dressmaking is a capital way of learning real practical needlework, both useful and decorative. Here we have every necessary element—designing, fitting, cutting-out, machining, hand-sewing, finishing, decorating, even down to the buttons! I encourage my children to invent and make their own dolls' clothes, and do not feel down-hearted when the tasteful little frocks and cloaks won't bear very close scrutiny of the stitches, and display anything but finish on the wrong side. The child has got hold of the main idea, to make something useful, suitable, and pretty, and *finish* is a later growth and will come in due time.

I must here enter a protest against not only the pillow-case method, but against the more advanced instruction conveyed in the laborious elaboration of linen or cotton underclothing. Surely this is distinctly unpractical, and is not only encouraging unreasonable estimates of the province of needlework, and false ideas of what is beautiful, but is helping to perpetuate a kind of clothing which is almost universally acknowledged by people of education to be unhealthy and unsuitable to our damp climate. We do not want to encourage girls now to make or to wear the elaborate undergarments, monstrosities of tucks and embroidery, which were considered essential to the outfit of their grandmothers, and which were certainly less unsuited to the life of women fifty years ago than they are now. We should try to keep our practice up to our theories, and girls are told all sorts of scientific facts about ventilation and non-conducting materials which they ought to be encouraged to apply practically to their own clothing. Girls take much more exercise than they did fifty years ago, and the clothing that did well enough for the mild constitutionals, and the sober old-

fashioned games of their grandmothers, are utterly unsuited to the healthier exercises, bicycling and hockey, of the children of the present day. Why should time be wasted in the elaborate production of unpractical garments, when it might be spent upon learning to design and carry out in suitable material what will be of actual use in the particular kind of life which is the one which most girls lead to-day? There is no more training or education to be got out of "tucks" than out of the neat finishing of a woven or flannel undergarment, and the latter supplies quite sufficient scope for the quiet and simple ornamentation, which alone is suitable to undergarments. Surely tucked and embroidered underclothing should be laid aside as belonging to a past age—the time when Jane Austen's heroines took mild walks in sandalled slippers no thicker than paper on fine days, had out their papa's carriage to visit a friend a mile off, and on wet days never stirred from the house. Their elegant leisure was spent in making beaded purses or copying poems into albums, and no doubt there was plenty of it left for the elaborate embroidering of their own delicate garments. But we live in a sterner age. And this brings me to the consideration of how the teaching of needlework is affected by the kind of life our girls will be called upon to lead.

The women of to-day have no time to waste on meaningless decoration of their own persons. They have awakened to the fact that the world has need of them, and that life has something else to offer than fancy-work to pass the time. Needlework as an "occupation" for women is, I am thankful to say, no longer required. So much active share in the life of the world is now open to them, that the hours need no longer hang heavy on their hands, and they need no longer stifle their souls in piles of useless handiwork, and bestow on the decoration of furniture and clothing the labour which might be spent in services to their fellow creatures of a more practical and a more far reaching kind. Women of leisure are wanted to help in the various branches of unpaid public work, in which the peculiar qualities of women are coming to be regarded as essential elements, while to women who work for their living, the highest intellectual careers are rapidly becoming open. In view of this altered state of things, is it not reasonable,

may, is it not *necessary*, that the old views about "women's work" should be modified, enlarged, brought up to date? Is it right to allow any part of a girl's education to remain narrow and stagnant, unpractical and opposed to the tendencies and influences of modern life? Here we have a useful and a pleasant handicraft, a pursuit for which women have a capacity and a liking, and an industry which must be done by somebody, and which every woman ought to learn, and will probably have to exercise. Surely in following this industry every discovery of science should be utilised, every new idea taken advantage of, every superfluous waste of time or labour got rid of, so that those who are obliged, however willingly, to devote part of their lives to the manufacture of clothes, may be able to fulfil that part of their duty well, and yet have time for the many other good and necessary duties and pleasures of life. If this is granted, we must also grant that the training of girls in this subject should be carried on in such a way as to enable them in after life to accomplish their duties as needleworkers, and yet to live the fullest and highest lives they are capable of, mentally and physically. Such lives are lived by many as wives and mothers, by many also as single women. For neither life are what are called the *domestic arts* sufficient, or even worthy to occupy a large portion of it. We have got beyond the stage at which the name "spinsters" was bestowed upon unmarried women, because to an unmarried woman no career was open but that of everlasting needlework. We must now look upon needlework as neither a preparation for a married life, nor for an unmarried one, but rather as a useful and necessary part of every woman's life, to be used simply as a means of obtaining necessary and beautiful clothing in the easiest and best way, so as to leave time for pursuits of a higher and more important kind. And to this end I would have needlework taught in the most interesting way, and with a view to practical application in after life—neither despising it as beneath the notice of a cultivated and intellectual woman, nor exalting it into a false position, as the height of feminine perfection and womanly attribute.

We take the greatest care to bring the education of our children up to date in most other branches, but we are too

apt to follow the old lines with regard to needlework, and to forget that what was suitable to one generation is not always suitable to the next. In needlework, therefore, as in other matters, if they are allowed to drop behind the age, it is no wonder if we fail to interest our children, and keep them fully alive to its advantages. If they chafe at having to follow the methods that were in vogue fifty years ago, it is no more than we deserve. The teaching of needlework cannot be a useful factor in education unless it is brought up to the age, and placed in its true position with regard to the ideas and tendencies of modern life. It seems to me that not only the higher arts, but the daily occupations and the domestic graces ought to be an expression of the thoughts and sentiments of the time; and if we wish to bring up our children in harmony and in sympathy with the best movements and the widest influences of their own time, we must, even in such a comparatively small matter as this, take care that the tendency is not retrograde, nor even stationary, but is up to the most advanced, in the best and truest sense, of the ideas of the age.

THE FÉSOLE CLUB PAPERS.

BY W. G. COLLINGWOOD.

XX. TABLEAUX VIVANTS.

THE portfolio of competition-drawings has just returned from its round, so that we are at last in a position to announce the prize for 1893-94. This time the members of the club were their own judges; they gave twenty votes to Miss Baskerville, to whom a book has been forwarded as first prize: Miss Beatrix Graham has taken the second with six votes: Miss Norah Leatham received two votes: and thirteen other members competed out of a roll of thirty. It may be noted that the prize-winners of past years were excluded from the competition. It may be noted also—and it is significant—that the club always shows its worst work in a competition, as though the effort of rivalry took all the joy out of the colours and the life out of the lines, while the steady-going application and the comradeship in ordinary class-practice have brought out the powers of the more diligent members to a surprising extent.

At the same time, not to be the bigots of an idea, we look forward to another competition next February, the subject of which will be a Portrait, as the result of our studies for the second half of this year. In October will begin a series of papers on the painting of Heads in water-colours, to follow the present course on Figures for Landscape-sketchers, in which we have advanced from the simple inert model to studies of attitude, action and effect. It remains only to offer some hints on grouping and the placing of figures in the picture.

Members who happen to possess the second volume of the *Parents' Review* will find in numbers VII. to X. of these papers some talk about the principles of composition, which, of course, applies to figures as well as to any other subject-matter. We noticed that the old, ancient meaning of the